

4.1 Aesthetics

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

PHYSICAL SETTING

Covering 4.7 square miles, the Planning Area includes sea-level bay marshlands and sloughs in the eastern area and hilly terrain rising to over 800 feet in elevation in the western area. Development in Belmont began in the 1890s; since its incorporation in 1926, it has grown from a small town of less than 1,000 residents to a community of more than 26,000. Belmont is known for its wooded hills, views of the San Francisco Bay, and stretches of open space. Most of the residential neighborhoods are found on the hillsides near open spaces and parks.

City Structure and Neighborhood Form

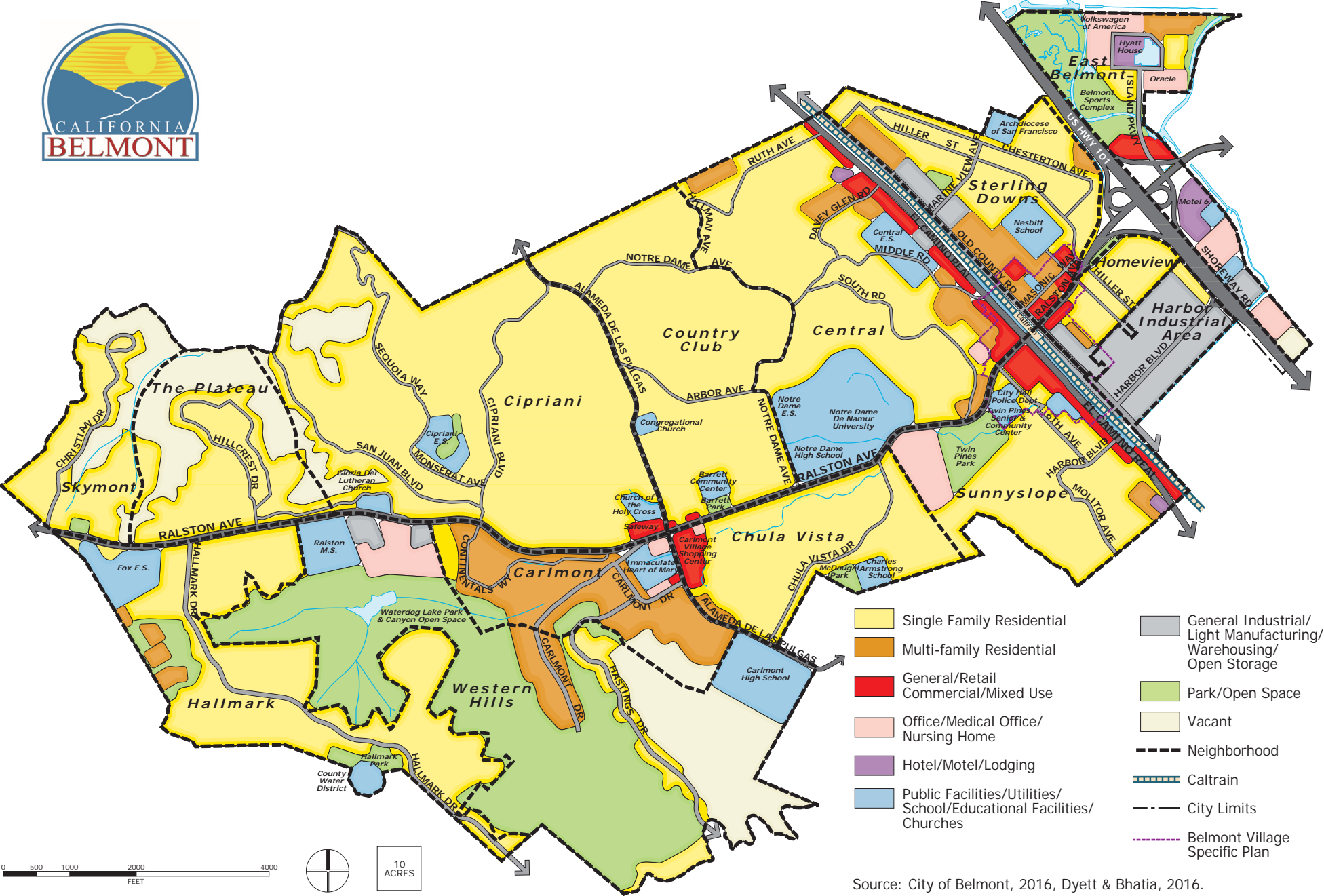
Belmont is served by four main arteries: Highway 101, El Camino Real, and Alameda de las Pulgas, which all run north-south through the city, and Ralston Avenue, which is the city's sole east-west thoroughfare. Residential uses are mostly concentrated west of El Camino Real, in Belmont's hillsides (although the Homeview and Sterling Downs neighborhoods are located east of El Camino Real), while commercial and industrial uses are clustered mostly east of and along El Camino Real. While the intersection of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue is considered Belmont's downtown, a second smaller commercial area, Carlmont Village Shopping Center, is located in the western side of town, at the intersection of Ralston and Alameda de las Pulgas. Several industrial and large office buildings are concentrated on the eastern edge of Belmont along Highway 101. Open space and parks account for 12.5 percent of the Planning Area, mostly located west of El Camino Real. Single-family dwellings are predominant in Belmont, but the city also holds several pockets of multi-family housing. The largest is located around Ralston Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas, and several other multi-family developments are scattered close to El Camino Real.

There are 14 different neighborhoods in Belmont distinct from each other based on location, architecture, streetscape, age, topography, and other characteristics. These neighborhoods are shown in Figure 4.1-1 and described below. The neighborhoods lie north and south of Ralston Avenue and east and west of El Camino Real.

North of Ralston Avenue and West of El Camino Real:

- **Skymont** consists of low density residential and open space land uses and is located on a steep hill on the far northwestern side of Belmont. Single-family homes are predominantly located along the crest of the hill, which runs roughly north-south across the neighborhood. Homes vary from one- to two-stories, and while older, most homes are in good condition. Lot sizes are small, but homes are usually set back from the street and adjacent properties; front yards are landscaped and well maintained. The streets usually have sidewalks, except where the adjacent hillside is too steep.
- As its name suggests, much of the **Plateau** neighborhood is located in a relatively flat area of the northwest hills of Belmont. Its single-family homes are clustered on a few narrow streets and surrounded by vacant parcels on hilly open spaces, including the San Juan Canyon hills. Most of the lots are small in size, but those adjacent to the surrounding open space are often larger in size. In general, homes are set back from the street with front yards that are landscaped and well-maintained. Many of the homes are close together because parcels are narrow and the side setbacks are very small.
- **Cipriani** is a large, hilly residential neighborhood with single-family homes punctuated by occasional public facilities and commercial offices. Narrow residential streets with few sidewalks wind up and down through the hills, offering sweeping views of the bay or surrounding hillsides. Homes step up and down the hills, with large front or back yards going up or down the hillside. Some homes, especially those on the lower side of the street, have fences up along the street for privacy. Cipriani has some vacant parcels scattered throughout the neighborhood, usually on steep hillsides, and some on the western side of the neighborhood are very large in size. There is a large tree canopy in the neighborhood.
- **Country Club** consists of low-density residential, commercial office, and public facility land uses. The southern portion of the neighborhood, near Ralston Avenue, is relatively flat with wider, straight streets with street parking, sidewalks, and small street trees. Many of the homes have the same size front yard setback, creating an even line of houses down the street. The northern portion of the neighborhood has hills and winding streets with similar characteristics to the Cipriani neighborhood. Northern lots are larger than southern lots, and some have elaborate fences or tall landscaping to create privacy screens along the street. Homes vary in size across the Country Club neighborhood, but many have well-maintained front yards with landscaping.
- The **Central** neighborhood has lower, flatter areas as well as steep hills, with low- to high-density residential, commercial, and public facility land uses. Single-family homes are generally in the hills and have similar characteristics to the Country Club and Cipriani neighborhoods. Streets at lower elevations are wider with on-street parking and sidewalks, while those in the hills are narrow with sporadic sidewalks. The eastern portion of the neighborhood is adjacent to El Camino Real with a mix of commercial and multifamily residential uses, including garden apartments of two to three stories to taller apartment buildings up to six stories. The commercial buildings range in height from one to four stories; some have no front yard setbacks and create a street wall along El Camino Real, but others are set back with surface parking lots.

Figure 4.1-1: City Structure and Neighborhood Form



Source: City of Belmont, 2016, Dyett & Bhatia, 2016.



Many of Belmont's residential neighborhoods are in the hills west of El Camino Real and offer great views and large tree canopies, as shown in the top two photos. Many of the homes are older, but they are generally in good condition with well-maintained yards. Ralston Avenue near El Camino Real is shown in the bottom right photo.

South of Ralston Avenue and West of El Camino Real:

- Located at the southwestern edge of Belmont, at a high elevation in the hills, **Hallmark** is primarily a residential neighborhood with some school and park uses. Homes near Ralston Avenue are smaller and more compact, while large two-story single-family homes with deep front setbacks and sophisticated landscaping are common in the southern portion of the neighborhood. Clustered townhomes are located at the western edge of the neighborhood, surrounded by open space. Many of the wide streets have on-street parking, with sidewalks on both sides. Street trees in this neighborhood are smaller than in other Belmont hillside neighborhoods.
- **Western Hills** has the most hills, with most land currently undeveloped open space. Development is concentrated to the northern and eastern sides of the neighborhood, where the topography is more flat. Ralston Middle School and a few office and industrial buildings are along Ralston Avenue. Apartment complexes, townhomes, and single-family homes are in the Western Hills. Whereas buildings on Carlmont Court are new and have a uniform architectural style, those on Hastings Drive vary greatly in architectural form and size. On the very east corner of the Western Hills neighborhood is Carlmont High School. Similar to Hallmark neighborhood, the streets are wide enough for on-street parking, with sidewalks on both sides of the street and small street trees.
- **Carlmont** has the most concentrated amount of condominium and apartment complex developments in Belmont. Though varied in age, style, and scale, the residential buildings in the neighborhood are well maintained and landscaped. Non-residential developments can be found near the intersection of Ralston Avenue and Alameda De Las Pulgas, including a high school, a church, and a number of nursing homes and medical offices. In terms of streetscape, street parking and sidewalks are available in most places except where the street is adjacent to steep slopes.
- **Chula Vista** has flat areas near Belmont Creek and hills along the west and south boundaries of the neighborhood. With larger lots, Chula Vista's single-family homes are generally larger and more spread out than those of adjacent neighborhoods and have varied architectural forms. Many houses on Ralston Avenue have front yard fences and tall shrubs for screening purposes. Other development types include McDougal Park and Charles Armstrong School to the south, and a large retail complex at the intersection of Ralston Avenue and Alameda De Las Pulgas. There are many older, tall trees in the neighborhood, as well as local views from the hillsides and ridgelines of the neighborhood. Many of the streets have sidewalks, and some have on-street parking.
- **Sunnyslope** neighborhood can be further divided into three general sections: the Twin Pines Park; retail and civic areas near Ralston Avenue and El Camino Real; and residential uses. Along El Camino Real and near the Belmont Station, human-scale retail and mixed-use buildings create a friendly and vibrant streetscape. Near the retail corridor is Waltermire Historic District, where some of Belmont's oldest single-family houses and village-like streetscapes are preserved. Houses and lot sizes are greater in the southwestern corner of Sunnyslope, where the hillsides are steeper.



The neighborhoods east of El Camino Real are distinct from other Belmont neighborhoods, with larger buildings in East Belmont (left) and varied industrial and commercial buildings on Old County Road (right).

East of El Camino Real:

- **Sterling Downs** is Belmont's neighborhood east of El Camino Real, west of Highway 101, and north of Ralston Avenue. It has two distinct physical characteristics: a residential area in the northeastern portion, and a mix of apartments, light industrial and commercial buildings, and a school northeast of Old County Road and Ralston Avenue. The single-family homes in Sterling Downs are small and have relatively uniform form with small lots and small side setbacks. Large garden apartment complexes of two to three stories and manufacturing businesses line Old County Road. Around the corner, Ralston Avenue has a few commercial and service developments. Sidewalks are well maintained and connected throughout the neighborhood, especially within the residential area. Trees are smaller than in the Belmont hills.
- Similar to Sterling Downs, the **Homeview** neighborhood is on flat terrain between El Camino Real and Highway 101, south of Ralston Avenue. It consists of an orthogonal grid with small-lot single-family homes, duplexes, and apartments. Many of the residences are older but fairly well maintained. Bordering the Harbor Industrial Area on the southern side, many houses along O'Neill Avenue have fences or thick trees and shrubs up to six or seven feet high for screening. There are community-oriented businesses along Ralston Avenue and light industrial uses along Old County Road. The streets have sidewalks and on-street parking, but few street trees outside of private yards.
- The **Harbor Industrial Area** is south of Homeview with industrial and commercial uses and a mobile home park. It is an unincorporated area within the Sphere of Influence of Belmont and described in more detail below.
- Separated from the rest of Belmont by Highway 101, **East Belmont** is very different from other neighborhoods because of its generally large-scale developments, including office parks, hotels, and auto-related commercial uses. The neighborhood features large buildings, ample surface parking lots, and improved streetscapes with medians and bike lanes. At the northeast corner of East Belmont are a few blocks of two-story single-family homes and townhomes. The O'Neill Slough and the Belmont Sports Complex are the two large open space areas in the neighborhood.

Belmont Village

Belmont Village encompasses approximately 80 acres around the intersection of El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue, in Belmont's downtown. In general, Belmont Village is bound by Wessex Way, Hiller Street and the city limits on the east, and Sixth Avenue from Broadway Street to Hill Street and Middle Road on the west.

Trees are present on many of the streets in a range of species, ages, and sizes, though there are a few blocks without them, including stretches of Ralston Avenue, El Camino Real, and Old County Road. Raised medians with trees and river stones line the center of El Camino Real and the eastern stretch of Ralston Avenue. Benches and landscaped planters are present on a few streets, including the bus stops on El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue. Some property owners have invested in high-quality landscaping and pedestrian amenities on their parcels, such as the new developments along El Camino Real in the commercial core.

Street lighting is much more variable across Belmont Village. Large highway light fixtures line El Camino Real and major intersections of Ralston Avenue. Pedestrian-scale light fixtures are included on some streets, including in the commercial core, but the style and size differs between streets. The newer development along El Camino Real includes pedestrian-scale lighting with hanging baskets of colorful flowers. Some sections of the streets lack lighting fixtures altogether. Streetlights along Old County Road are included on large utility poles, which also have many heavy wires that dominate the street visually for pedestrians.

The focal point of Belmont Village is the "Corners," where El Camino Real, Ralston Avenue, and the Caltrain tracks meet in the center of downtown Belmont. Ralston Avenue is a four-to-six-lane arterial, El Camino Real is a six-lane State highway, and the Caltrain tracks are located on an elevated train berm that runs parallel to El Camino Real. This crossroads divides the downtown area into four distinct districts, or quadrants. Old County Road is another key corridor on the eastern side of the Village that runs parallel to the Caltrain tracks. The neighborhoods adjacent to the Village are mainly comprised of low-density residential uses. There is also a cluster of light industrial uses adjacent to the Village, located in the unincorporated Harbor Economic Opportunity Area.

There are several commercial activity nodes in the Village, but no clear focal point. Although the Safeway grocery store acts as a retail anchor, it is separated by surface parking lots from the rest of the retail buildings in the area, which reduces the potential benefit to neighboring businesses of extra foot traffic. The Village's disconnected shopping centers and stand-alone strip retail buildings contribute to its absence of a strong, visually cohesive quality and identity. Additionally, there is no central gathering space for the community that could attract visitors and activity. As a result, patrons generally drive and park between each destination in the Village, instead of choosing to park once to walk, browse, and linger in the downtown.

Building Type, Scale, and Massing

The layout and built form of Belmont's downtown has not changed significantly since the mid-twentieth century. Figure 4.1-2 is a figure-ground diagram, representing the Village's buildings and the spaces between them. The diagram shows the extent to which the Village's buildings are separated by parking lots and wide rights of way, which creates an environment that is not conducive

to walking. It also illustrates the fragmented and inconsistent street grid, which causes unpredictability and navigational challenges for pedestrians not only from quadrant to quadrant, but also from block to block.

Figure 4.1-3 shows representative building types in the Village. Commercial development is dispersed throughout the downtown area in a mixture of traditional street-front buildings and 1960s-style strip developments. Most development is auto-oriented, with buildings, including Safeway, Walgreens, and City Hall, facing onto surface parking lots instead of the street. Beyond the large retailers and City Hall, many of the retail buildings in the Village are small in size and one or two stories in height. In 2000, two single-story multi-tenant retail developments were constructed on El Camino Real, providing a continuous retail frontage from Ralston Avenue to Emmett Street, and from Waltermire to O'Neill Streets.

To the north of the Village commercial core are multifamily residences, which are older, simple apartment buildings or duplexes with few distinguishing architectural details, ranging from one to two stories. To the south of the Village commercial core, single-family homes are one- to two-story structures that display a variety of historical architectural styles and are part of the Waltermire Historic District.

East of El Camino Real, commercial buildings on the eastern stretch of Ralston Avenue are predominantly auto-oriented, one-story structures, such as gas stations or fast food restaurants, or traditional, small street-front buildings. There is one strip retail shopping center in the northeast corner of the Village, at the corner of Granada Street and Masonic Way. The service commercial buildings along Old County Road tend to be older, single-story industrial buildings and garages. The multifamily buildings on the eastern side of El Camino Real are a mix of older, low-density apartments with few architectural details and newer, wood-frame apartments that are two- to three-stories tall with decks, patios, and trellises.

Figure 4.1-2: Figure Ground



Source: City of Belmont, 2017; Dyett & Bhatia, 2017.

Figure 4.1-3: Representative Building Types

COMMERCIAL



Recent development in the Village on Emmett Street and El Camino Real.



Service commercial buildings on Old County Road.



Retail buildings on the eastern stretch of Ralston Avenue.



Safeway, with a large parking lot between the building and street.



Auto-oriented retail on Sixth Avenue.



Traditional storefronts on the western stretch of Ralston Avenue.

RESIDENTIAL



Older apartment buildings in the northeast quadrant on Masonic Avenue and Granada Street.



Newer multifamily residential buildings on Masonic Avenue near Old County Road.



Single-family home in the Waltermire District near the commercial core of the Village.

Open Space

As the Village's most significant public space, a portion of Twin Pines Park is located in the most western area of the Village's southwest quadrant. Belmont Creek runs down towards the bay through Twin Pines Park and along the southwestern edge of the Village border, before flowing into a culvert near Sixth Avenue and O'Neill Avenue.

Scenic Resources and Views

Three of Belmont's 14 neighborhoods are characterized by their views—Skymont, Plateau, and Hallmark. Skymont is characterized by views of the bay and the surrounding hills, Plateau by views of open spaces and trees, and Hallmark by views of the bay to the east and mountains to the west.

Scenic Routes and Gateways

Although not a State-designated State Scenic Highway, Ralston Avenue is a main thoroughfare through Belmont, providing a scenic route through the Planning Area and offering scenic vistas from numerous vantage points. The road extends from the coastal areas in the east to the hills in the west, offering views of the San Francisco Bay and the surrounding hills. The closest designated State Scenic Highway to the Planning Area is Highway 280, which is designated as such from Route 17 in Santa Clara County to Route 80 near First Street in San Francisco. This roadway lies to the west of the Planning Area, about one-quarter to one mile from the city boundary, on the other side of the ridge that roughly forms Belmont's western edge.

REGULATORY SETTING

State Regulations

CEQA Statute and Guidelines

CEQA establishes that it is the policy of the State to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state "with...enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic, and historic environmental qualities" [California Public Resources Code Section 21001(b)].

California Scenic Highways Program

Recognizing the value of scenic areas and the value of views from roads in such areas, the State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program in 1963. Under this program, State highway segments are designated as eligible for inclusion as scenic routes. Once the local jurisdictions through which a roadway passes have established a corridor protection program, the State may officially designate a roadway as a scenic route. Proposed projects must then be evaluated for their impact on the scenic qualities of the corridor. Each designated corridor is monitored by the State and designation may be revoked if a local government fails to enforce the provisions of the corridor protection program.

Highway 280 from Route 17 in Santa Clara County to Route 80 near First Street in San Francisco is classified as a State Scenic Highway. This includes the portion of Highway 280 west of the Planning Area.

SB 743 (Steinberg, 2013)

SB 743 made several changes to the analysis required under CEQA. According to SB 743, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research is directed to develop a new approach for analyzing the transportation impacts under CEQA to replace the existing approach of measuring auto delay (Public Resources Code Section 21099). In addition, certain projects consistent with a Specific Plan are exempt from additional CEQA analysis (Public Resources Code Section 21155.4), and the analysis of aesthetic and parking impacts are no longer required in some circumstances.

Regional Regulations

Plan Bay Area – Sustainable Communities Strategy

Plan Bay Area is a long-range, integrated transportation and land-use/housing strategy through 2040 for the San Francisco Bay Area. The plan was adopted on July 18, 2013 by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments, both of which govern the nine-county Bay Area, including San Mateo County and the City of Belmont. The plan identifies "Priority Development Areas" as areas for investment, new homes and job growth. A portion of the City of Belmont and the Planning Area are identified as a "Mixed-Use Corridor" Priority Development Area, which encompasses the entire BVSP Area, as shown in Figure 4.1-4.

Local Regulations

San Mateo County General Plan

The San Mateo County General Plan was adopted in 1986 to "provide overall policy guidance to assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of all County resources" (*San Mateo County General Plan*, 1986). The San Mateo County Zoning Regulations were last updated in December 2015. Until such time as the unincorporated Harbor Industrial Area (the area in Belmont's Sphere of Influence) is annexed, this area is subject to the San Mateo County General Plan and Zoning Regulations. The San Mateo County General Plan includes a chapter on Visual Quality (Chapter 4) with relevant policies regulating appearance of new development, scenic corridors, and ridgelines.

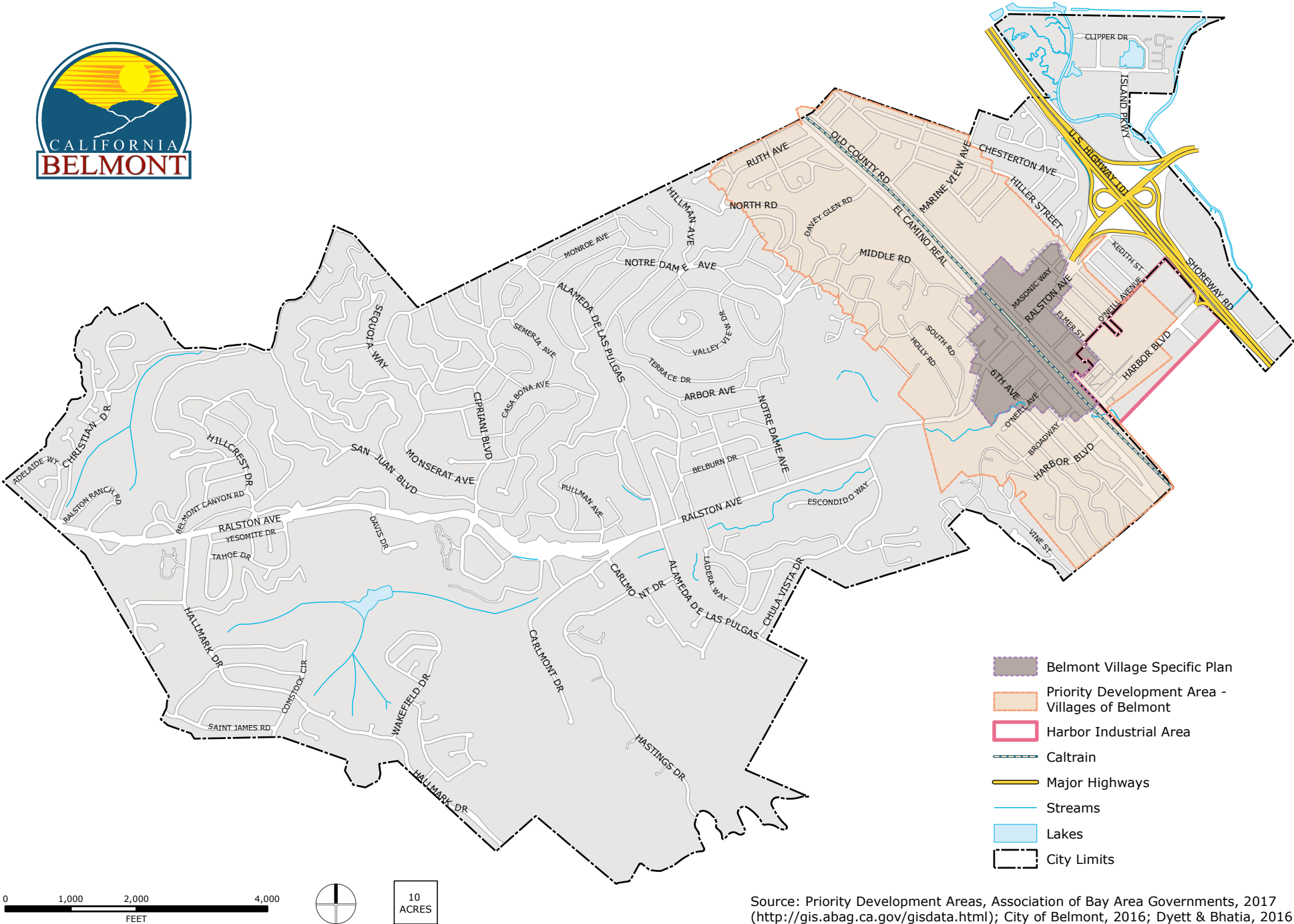
San Mateo County Zoning Regulations

The San Mateo County Zoning Regulations were last updated in December 2015. Throughout the Zoning Regulations are policies relevant to aesthetics impacts. These policies include design review requirements and maximum building heights as part of the development standards for various zoning district types, each with its own chapter, as well as limits on glare from properties onto neighboring parcels.

City of Belmont General Plan

The 1982 Belmont General Plan contains an Open Space section within its Land Use-Open Space Element that contains policies that seek to protect scenic areas, views, trees, natural drainage channels, and plant and wildlife habitats. The Conservation Element of the General Plan includes policies that seek to preserve natural terrain, vegetation, and views. Additionally, the Circulation Element includes policies to preserve scenic streets. The General Plan Update (part of the Proposed Project) would replace the City's current General Plan.

Figure 4.1-4: Priority Development Area



Belmont Downtown Specific Plan

The Belmont Village PDA is currently the primary development focus area of the city. Belmont's current Downtown Specific Plan includes street tree and landscape requirements to create attractive, pedestrian-focused streets. This Downtown Specific Plan would be replaced by the Belmont Village Specific Plan as part of the Proposed Project.

City of Belmont Residential Design Guidelines

Belmont's Design Review Process is "intended to preserve the natural beauty of Belmont and ensure that structures enhance their sites and are harmonious with their surrounding areas" (*City of Belmont Residential Design Guidelines* 2011). In particular, Belmont's Zoning Ordinance includes Section 13A – Single Family and Duplex Residential Design Review that applies to new dwellings, major additions, and some site renovations. To grant approval for proposed development, the following findings must be made:

- (a) The Buildings and structures shown on the site plan will be:
 - (1) Designed to be compatible with any existing development on the site;
 - (2) Located and designed to minimize disruptions of existing public views, and to protect the profile of prominent ridgelines.
- (b) The overall site and building plans achieve an acceptable balance of the following factors:
 - (1) Building bulk,
 - (2) Grading, including
 - (A) Disturbed surface area, and
 - (B) Total cubic yards, cut and fill.
 - (3) The aesthetic impacts of hardscape as viewed from a public vantage point.
- (c) All proposed accessory and support features, including driveway and parking surfaces, underfloor areas, retaining walls, utility services and other accessory structures will be integrated into the overall project design.
- (d) The proposed landscape plan will incorporate:
 - (1) Native plants appropriate to the site's environmental setting and microclimate, and
 - (2) Appropriate landscape screening of proposed accessory and support structures.
- (e) The project will be in substantial compliance with the Residential Design Guidelines and Residential Design Criteria as applicable.
- (f) City staff and consultants have provided technical review and conditions of approval are included, as applicable, regarding project-related grading, drainage, storm-water runoff, vehicular and pedestrian access, site stability, structural encroachments, and construction impacts.

To help developers and project applicants through the Design Review Process, Belmont adopted the Residential Design Guidelines in 2011, which include an overview of the process and examples of projects that are consistent with the required Design Review Findings.

City of Belmont Tree Ordinance

The City of Belmont has a tree ordinance (Municipal Code Chapter 25) that prohibits damage to any tree with a stem or trunk diameter greater than ten inches and requires a permit for removal of any such trees. In addition, trees that are removed must be replaced or an in-lieu fee must be paid according to certain guidelines.

City of Belmont Buildings Ordinance, Structures of Historic or Aesthetic Value Article

The City of Belmont has a buildings ordinance (Municipal Code Chapter 7, Article VII) that preserves, enhances, and perpetuates buildings, structures, and areas having special historical or aesthetic interest or value which contribute to community aesthetics and identity. The ordinance prescribes the procedure for altering, relocating, and demolishing structures so classified.

4.1.2 Impact Analysis

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Implementation of the Proposed Project would have a potentially significant adverse impact if it would:

- Criterion 1:** Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- Criterion 2:** Substantially damage scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings) visible from State- or county-designated or eligible scenic highways.
- Criterion 3:** Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Planning Area and its surroundings.
- Criterion 4:** Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS

A programmatic visual assessment was conducted through multiple windshield and pedestrian surveys of the Planning Area and photographs taken of views from representative locations throughout the city. Surveyed routes included, but were not limited to:

- The entire extent of Ralston Avenue, from Highway 101 to Highway 92, in both directions;
- The entire Belmont extent of Alameda de las Pulgas, in both directions;
- The entire Belmont extent of El Camino Real, in both directions;
- The entire Belmont extent of Old County Road, in both directions;
- Trails leading to scenic vistas in the Western Hills area and around Waterdog Lake; and
- Block by block reconnaissance on foot of the Belmont Village Specific Plan area.

To evaluate potential impacts on visual resources in Belmont, this analysis considered potential degradation to existing views and scenic resources, and existing visual character of the city. As aesthetics and visual resources are subjective by nature, the impacts are qualitatively evaluated.

IMPACT SUMMARY

Adoption of the land use designations (and corresponding zoning districts) in the Land Use Element of the proposed General Plan and the Land Use chapter of the proposed Specific Plan could result in higher density or intensity development that could partially obstruct views currently available to the public as well as degrade visual quality. However, implementation of policies in the Proposed Project would reduce the impacts of this development on visual resources. Proposed policies would strengthen design guidance in developed areas, and facilitate the preservation of the hillsides, open space, and other natural areas, which are important visual features. The wooded hills between Highway 280 and Belmont comprise the scenic resources visible from the portion of Highway 280 west of the Planning Area. These scenic hills are not included in the Planning Area and as such will not be impacted by the Proposed Project. New development under the Proposed Project is not expected to create new sources of light or glare that could substantially affect day or nighttime views in the area.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Impact

4.1-1 Implementation of the Proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (*Less than Significant*)

Impact of Proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and Climate Action Plan

Belmont is characterized by views of its wooded hills, the San Francisco Bay, mountains to the west of Belmont, and stretches of open space. A number of the proposed General Plan policies provide long-term protections for scenic vistas in Belmont. Within the Land Use Element, General Plan Policy 2.13-3 ensures appropriately scaled development that respects natural terrain so that hills, open space, and vistas, rather than buildings, dominate the landscape, Policy 2.14-3 creates design standards for the interface between open spaces and neighborhoods that allow aesthetic values to flourish, and Policy 2.14-4 ensures that development on hillsides is designed to preserve or enhance the visual quality of the existing topography. Other policies that protect scenic vistas include Policy 3.4-6, which locates, designs, and landscapes new roadways to preserve the beauty of the area, and Policy 5.3-7, which encourages the planting of native trees, shrubs, and grasslands in order to preserve the visual integrity of the landscape. In addition, the Phase I Zoning extends the Hillside Residential and Open Space Districts that preserve natural terrain while providing residential development.

The land use designations included in the proposed General Plan continue to preserve open spaces in Belmont for conservation and recreation, and in doing so preserve the potential for views of those open spaces. General Plan Policy 2.13-1 preserves open space by ensuring that new development is balanced with preservation of open space and natural features, Policy 4.4-1 designates and protects open space lands for the preservation of scenic areas, and Policy 4.5-4 preserves the existing open space areas on steep hillsides in the San Juan Hills and Western Hills. The Phase I Zoning also

creates a new Open Space Privately-Owned (OS-PO) District to preserve privately-owned natural areas.

Open space in Belmont could be subject to development pressure as the population continues to expand. General Plan Policy 4.4-3 would cluster development in the hillside areas of western Belmont that are already mostly developed, which would accommodate some growth without requiring the development of undisturbed open space. By clustering development in this fashion, the General Plan would prevent encroachment onto existing open spaces and their views.

The General Plan and Phase I Zoning allow for greater building density, intensity, and height in the Belmont Village PDA, around El Camino Real, the Harbor Industrial Area, Carlmont Village, parcels east of Highway 101, and parcels surrounding Davis Drive. Future redevelopment projects and development of vacant lots within and adjacent to already-developed neighborhoods will keep development from occurring in open spaces and be subject to regulation and design review mechanisms to ensure there is no substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas.

The construction of new projects in the Planning Area could potentially result in short-term visual impacts including blockage or disruption of views by construction equipment and scaffolding, the removal of landscaping, temporary route changes, temporary signage, exposed excavation, and construction staging areas. However, these visual impacts will be short-term and will last intermittently during actual phased periods of construction at specific locations within the Planning Area. The final built condition of the projects will include landscaping and other design features to enhance the visual character and preserve view corridors of Belmont's scenic vistas. As such, the Proposed Project would not significantly affect scenic vistas in Belmont.

The Climate Action Plan (CAP) Measure EC3 includes financial incentives for solar photovoltaic cell installation as a strategy to reduce building energy use within the Planning Area community, and CAP Measure EM4 calls for feasibility studies for solar energy projects at City facilities. General Plan Policy 2.13-7 regulates the placement of these solar projects, as identified below, ensuring that they will not disrupt the Planning Area's vistas. Moreover, CAP Measure TL1 prioritizes infill growth, which helps protect open spaces that may constitute scenic vistas.

As a result of implementation of the proposed General Plan policies, Phase I Zoning regulations, and CAP measures as described above and listed below, the impact of the General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and CAP would be less than significant.

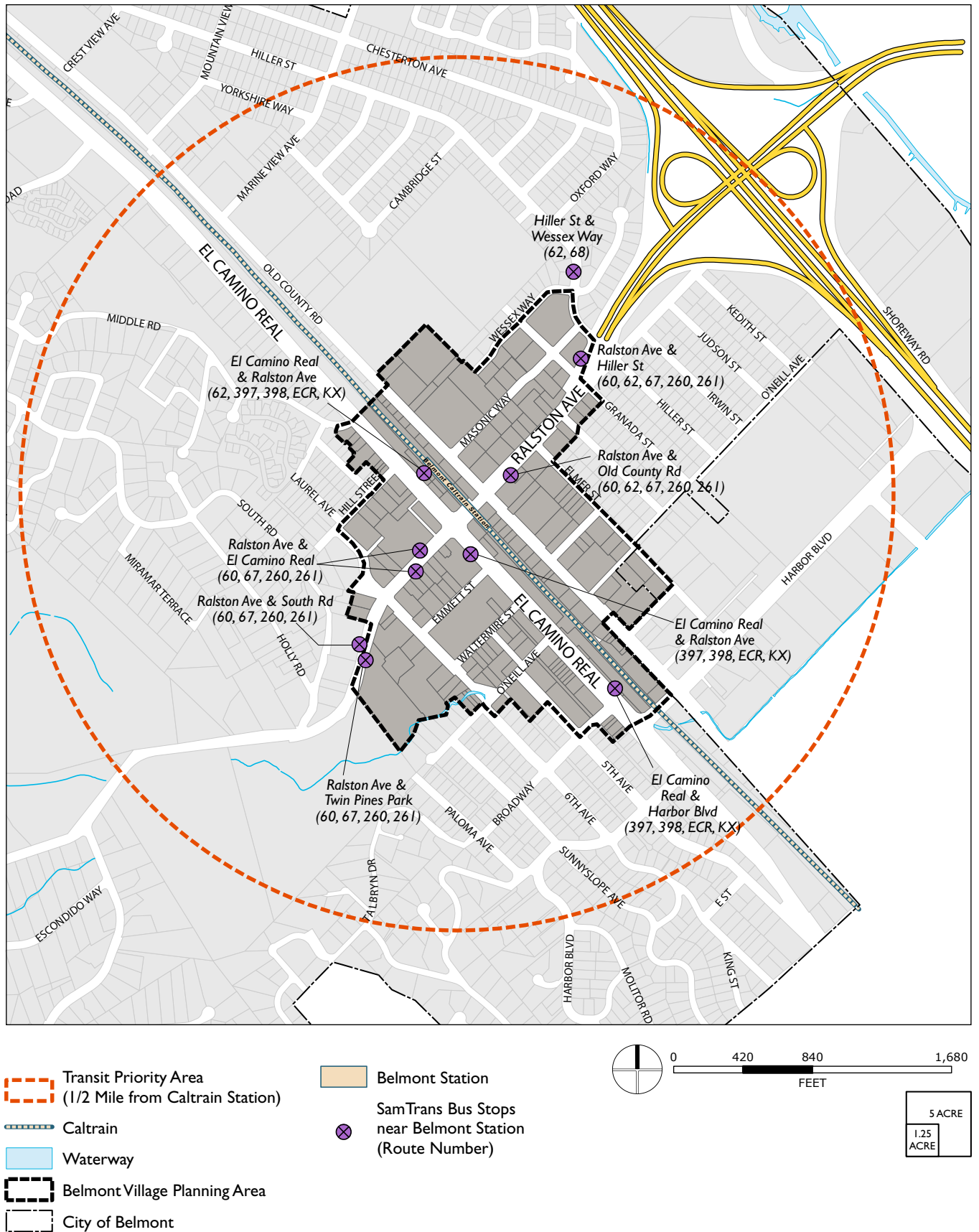
Impact of Belmont Village Specific Plan and Village Zoning

The General Plan Policies, Phase I Zoning, and CAP Measures discussed above apply within the BVSP Area. Additionally, the Urban Design Chapter of the BVSP and the associated zoning regulations include development standards and design guidelines that will preserve scenic vistas in the Planning Area, resulting in a less than significant impact. These guidelines strengthen design guidance in developed areas, and facilitate the preservation of the hillsides, open space, and other natural areas, which are important visual features. Moreover, the standards allow for greater building intensity, density, and height in certain neighborhoods, allowing future development to be located in urban centers so that open spaces and scenic areas are preserved.

Of note, SB 743 (Stats. 2013, CH. 386) provides an exemption from CEQA regarding aesthetic and parking impacts for certain residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center projects on infill sites in transit priority areas. To qualify as an "employment center," a project must be located on property zoned for commercial uses with a floor area ratio (FAR) no less than 0.75. "Infill sites" are lots in urban areas that have previously been developed or vacant sites where at least 75 percent of the perimeter of the site adjoins or is across a public right of way from parcels developed with urban uses, and "transit priority area" means an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop as defined by Public Resources Code section 21064.3. The Caltrain Station in downtown Belmont is a major transit stop, and, as shown in Figure 4.1-5, the entire BVSP area is within one-half mile of the Station. Accordingly, the entire BVSP area is a transit priority area, and properties within its boundary may qualify for exemptions under SB 743. Therefore, all residential, mixed-use residential, and employment center developments that conform to the BVSP and Village Zoning will be exempt from aesthetics and parking analyses under CEQA. Finally, commercial developments that conform to the BVSP and Village Zoning but are not employment center projects would not significantly impact scenic vistas or view corridors, because the height limitations of the BVSP and Village Zoning would prevent a building with less than 0.75 FAR from being tall enough to encroach upon such view corridors.

As a result of implementation of the policies and zoning regulations of the proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, CAP, and BVSP, as described above and listed below, the impact of the BVSP and associated zoning would be less than significant.

Figure 4.1-5: Transit Priority Area



Source: City of Belmont, 2014; San Mateo County Assessor's Parcel Database, 2016

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Proposed General Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Land Use Element

- 2.13-1 Ensure that new development is balanced with preservation of open space and natural features.
- 2.13-3 Ensure that the scale and character of new development is appropriate to the setting and intended use. Promote development that is scaled and sited to respect the natural terrain, so that hills, parks, open space, trees, and distant vistas, rather than buildings, dominate the overall landscape, while also developing the Belmont Village PDA and other focus areas for economic growth as concentrated, urban-scale nodes of activity.
- 2.13-7 Require energy and telecommunication devices (such as solar panels) that are added to the exteriors of buildings, or otherwise visible on a site, to be designed to minimize impacts on scenic views and vistas from the public realm to the maximum extent feasible without interfering with their function.
- 2.14-3 Create clear design standards for the interface between open spaces and neighborhoods, especially in the Urban/Wildland Interface Zone. Standards should identify the margin of open space needed to allow wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic values to flourish while also reducing threats of fire and invasive plant species. Incorporate “Defensible Space” standards as needed in areas of high wildfire risk.
- 2.14-4 Ensure that development on hillsides, where permitted pursuant to regulations in the Zoning Ordinance, is designed to preserve or enhance the visual quality of the existing topography.

Circulation Element

- 3.4-6 Locate, design, and landscape new roadways to preserve the beauty of the area, prevent erosion, and help shield residents from noise and air pollution. To the extent possible, retain trees and vegetative cover and minimize grading.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element

- 4.4-1 Continue to designate and protect open space lands for the preservation of scenic areas, natural drainage ways, and plant and wildlife habitats; for outdoor recreation; and for public health and safety.
- 4.4-3 Consistent with the San Juan Hills and Western Hills area plans, cluster development in the hillside areas of western Belmont in order to maintain contiguous habitat areas, minimize grading, and limit exposure to steep slopes and other sensitive areas.
- 4.5-4 Seek to preserve the existing open space areas in the San Juan Hills and Western Hills, consistent with the Area Plans, especially on steep hillsides and sensitive habitat areas.

Conservation Element

- 5.3-7 Encourage the planting of native trees, shrubs, and grasslands in order to preserve the visual integrity of the landscape, provide habitat conditions suitable for native vegetation, and ensure the maximum number and variety of well-adapted plants are maintained.

Proposed Belmont Village Specific Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Urban Design Chapter

See above discussion in the Impact Summary.

Proposed Climate Action Plan Measures that Would Reduce the Impact

TL1 Establish a Smart Growth Policy that prioritizes infill, higher density, transportation oriented and mixed-use development.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

4.1-2 Implementation of the Proposed Project would not damage scenic resources visible from state- or county- designated or eligible scenic highways. (No Impact)

Impact of Proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, Climate Action Plan

Highway 280 from Route 17 in Santa Clara County to Route 80 near First Street in San Francisco is classified as a State Scenic Highway. This includes the portion of Highway 280 west of the Planning Area. The wooded hills between Highway 280 and the Planning Area comprise the scenic resources visible from the portion of Highway 280 west of the Planning Area. These scenic hills are not included in the Planning Area and as such will not be impacted by the Proposed Project.

The Phase I Zoning and the CAP do not have elements that are distinct from the overall Proposed Project as it relates to this impact.

Impact of Belmont Village Specific Plan and Village Zoning

The BVSP and the associated zoning regulations do not have elements that are distinct from the overall Proposed Project as it relates to this impact.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

4.1-3 Implementation of the Proposed Project could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Planning Area and its surroundings. (Less than Significant)

Impact of Proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and Climate Action Plan

As the majority of the Planning Area for Belmont is protected open space or already-developed neighborhoods, the proposed General Plan and Phase I Zoning call for few substantive changes to land use or development standards, and thus will create minimal contrasts with the scale, form, color, or overall visual character of these existing neighborhoods. The General Plan and Phase I

Zoning protect the character of existing neighborhoods while providing guidance for future development. Policy 2.4-1 promotes neighborhood preservation, as well as new development in the hillsides, and Policy 2.4-3 similarly promotes neighborhood preservation and new development in the residential areas east of El Camino Real.

Although the General Plan and Phase I Zoning anticipate more housing units and non-residential development than the existing conditions, almost all future development anticipated in the General Plan and Phase I Zoning is infill development—development on vacant or underutilized sites in existing neighborhoods. In those areas where the General Plan and Phase I Zoning calls for changes in land use and physical design, it is expected that the impact will be less than significant because the proposed changes in land use and physical design are intended to increase the visual quality of the affected areas, create a more unified visual experience, and fill in vacant and undesirable visual areas with attractive and economically vibrant new development. New investment in urban infill areas typically improves visual quality by developing vacant or underutilized properties and improving maintenance of existing structures and yards. Policy 2.13-3 reduces the potential impact of new development that is inconsistent with established neighborhoods. New development of high quality design can enhance the built environment with new architecture that is in character with or complements existing structures. Policy 2.5-4 supports upgrades to existing establishments through façade and streetscape improvements; Policy 2.5-7 requires the improvement of Belmont Village’s physical image; Policy 2.6-6 ensures that commercial uses have dignified and visually appealing designs; and Policy 3.4-5 in the Circulation Element ensures that new road improvements minimize visual impacts.

The Harbor Industrial Area land use designations (HIA-1 and HIA-2) in the General Plan and corresponding zoning districts in the Phase I Zoning, which apply to the unincorporated area within Belmont’s SOI, allow for similar levels of density and intensity as are currently permitted by San Mateo County zoning. However, by broadening the types of uses that are permitted in this area, the Phase I Zoning may create greater incentives for development or redevelopment. This new development may result in some buildings that are taller or of a greater scale than the current development in the local neighborhood. Taller or larger buildings do not necessarily constitute a visual impact, and policies in the General Plan and development standards in the Phase I Zoning establish stricter standards for design and compatibility with a project’s surroundings than the current San Mateo County zoning has in place. Policy 2.13-2 promotes compatibility of land uses specifically where the Harbor Industrial Area borders Belmont Village and the Homeview neighborhood. As noted above, 2.13-3 requires that the scale and character of new development is appropriate to the setting and intended use so that hills, parks, open space, trees, and distant vistas, rather than buildings, dominate the overall landscape. Implementation of the General Plan and Phase I Zoning would keep taller or larger buildings from being developed in a way that block important viewsheds that exist throughout the Planning Area.

As discussed under Impact 4.1-1, Measure EC3 in the CAP calls for financial incentives for solar photovoltaic cell installation and Measure EM4 requires a feasibility studies for solar energy projects at City facilities. Proposed General Plan Policy 2.13-7 regulates the placement of these solar projects to ensure that they will not disrupt the Planning Area’s visual qualities. Additionally, Measure TL2 in the CAP calls for street beautification as part of its Complete Streets measure.

As a result of implementation of the proposed General Plan policies, Phase I Zoning regulations, and CAP measures as described above and listed below, the General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and CAP will not substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the city, resulting in a less than significant impact.

Impact of Belmont Village Specific Plan and Village Zoning

The BVSP and the associated zoning regulations permit higher densities and intensities in the downtown area than existing regulations. The Urban Design Chapter of the BVSP includes design standards and robust design guidelines that will improve the visual character of new development in Belmont Village. Different design guidelines apply to street frontage, site planning general building design, retail design, office design, residential design, and parking, ensuring the visual quality in the public realm through all types of development and investment. In addition, the General Plan Policies, Phase I Zoning, and CAP Measures discussed above apply within the BVSP Area. Of note, as explained under Impact 4.1-1, the entirety of the BVSP Area falls within a Transit Priority Area as defined by SB 743, and therefore certain projects consistent with the BVSP will be exempt from CEQA analysis of aesthetic and parking impacts.

As a result of implementation of the policies and zoning regulations of the proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, CAP, and BVSP, as described above and listed below, the impact of the BVSP and associated zoning would be less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Land Use Element

- 2.4-1 Promote neighborhood preservation and enhancement while also facilitating development of and improvements to dwelling units in the hillsides, where allowed in the *Zoning Ordinance*.
- 2.4-3 Promote neighborhood preservation and enhance residential areas east of El Camino Real, while also facilitating development of and improvements to dwelling units, where allowed in the *Zoning Ordinance*.
- 2.5-4 Support the upgrade of existing establishments through façade and streetscape improvements, upgraded public and private landscaping, and aesthetically upgraded signage and way-finding. Allow and promote outdoor dining, sidewalk cafes, and limited outdoor displays of merchandise to enliven street-level activity where appropriate.
- 2.5-7 Improve and enhance Belmont Village's physical image and desirability as a place to invest, through public investments in infrastructure, parking, streetscapes, and public spaces.
- 2.6-6 Ensure that commercial development is designed to include:
 - Integrated landscaping, parking (if required), signs, and site and building design.
 - Common ingress and egress, safe and convenient access and internal circulation (depending on site size), adequate off-street parking and loading facilities (if required), and accessibility by multiple modes of transportation.

- Architecture that emphasizes establishing community identity while presenting tasteful, dignified, and visually appealing designs compatible with their surroundings.
- 2.13-2 Promote compatibility of adjacent land uses along the interface of different residential density and non-residential intensity categories, such as where the Harbor Industrial Area borders Belmont Village and the Homeview neighborhood. Special attention should be given to buffering and transitional methods.
- 2.13-3 Ensure that the scale and character of new development is appropriate to the setting and intended use. Promote development that is scaled and sited to respect the natural terrain, so that hills, parks, open space, trees, and distant vistas, rather than buildings, dominate the overall landscape, while also developing the Belmont Village PDA and other focus areas for economic growth as concentrated, urban-scale nodes of activity.

In addition, 2.13-7, as listed under Impact 4.1-1 above.

Circulation Element

- 3.4-5 Design new roads and improvements to existing roads to minimize visual and environmental impacts.

Proposed Phase I Zoning Regulations that Would Reduce the Impact

Corridor Mixed Use District: Building design standards are established in Section 5A.1.13. Landscaping requirements are established in Section 5A.1.10.

Regional Commercial District: Supplemental design standards for shopping centers are established in Section 5.4.12(3).

Harbor Industrial Area District: Landscaping standards are established in Section 5B.1.9. Residential building design standards are established in Section 5B.1.12. Section 5B.2.10(d) establishes standards for the maximum height and design of a building wall that abuts a residential district.

Proposed Belmont Village Specific Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Urban Design Chapter

The Urban Design Chapter of the BVSP and the associated zoning regulations include development standards and design guidelines that will preserve scenic resources in Belmont Village. These standards specify street trees, ornamental shrubs and landscaping, open space requirements to enhance the visual qualities of streets, building frontages, and parking areas. The Urban Design Chapter and the zoning regulations establish street frontage standards to enhance pedestrians' visual experience. Among other strategies, the design guidelines improve the visual characteristics of Belmont Village by allowing for a variety of architectural styles; requiring storage, trash, and mechanical areas to be in enclosed spaces at the back side of retail spaces; and encouraging public art.

Proposed Climate Action Plan Measures that Would Reduce the Impact

TL2 Remake urban landscape to ensure Complete Streets, with bike lanes, bike parking, traffic calming, beautification, etc. Continue to support Paper Trails and Safe Routes to School to encourage walking.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact

4.1-4 Implementation of the Proposed Project could create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (*Less than Significant*)

Impact of Proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and Climate Action Plan

The construction of new buildings in the Planning Area may result in nighttime light or daytime glare. However, proposed General Plan Policy 2.13-4 requires that light and glare is minimized; and Policy 5.3-6 requires developers to use design features to avoid light pollution and glare.

In addition, there are a number of circumstances that mitigate the potential for new or substantial sources of light pollution in Belmont based on the location of new buildings. To the extent that new development will occur under the Proposed Project, it will mainly occur as redevelopment of existing built sites or infill development of unused parcels between existing built sites. When facilities such as parking lots are replaced with buildings, these replacements may reduce nighttime sources of light, because parking lots are often more brightly lit during the nighttime than most buildings. Infill development of underutilized or vacant parcels may result in new light sources, but they would likely be congruous with nearby light sources (e.g., lighting from shop windows, or upper story residential windows).

The Phase I Zoning introduces a definition for a full cut-off lighting fixture, also known as a fully shielded light fixture, which is designed to project all light downward in order and reduce unwanted glare that may affect nighttime views. These fixtures would be required in the design standards for new zoning districts referenced under Impact 4.1-3 above.

Implementation of the CAP will reduce glare and light pollution through the use of more efficient lighting under Measure EM1.

As a result of implementation of the proposed General Plan policies, Phase I Zoning regulations, and CAP measures as described above and listed below, the impact of the General Plan, Phase I Zoning, and CAP would be less than significant.

Impact of Belmont Village Specific Plan and Village Zoning

Similar to the impact of the General Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Phase I Zoning, the construction of new buildings in the Planning Area under the BVSP and the associated zoning regulations may result in nighttime light or daytime glare. However, Policy 2.13-4 and Policy 5.3-6 of the General Plan apply to the BVSP area and reduce the impact.

Of note, as explained under impact 4.1-1 above, certain projects within a half-mile of the Caltrain station, which includes the entirety of the BVSP Area, will be exempt from CEQA analysis of aesthetics impacts.

As a result of implementation of the policies and regulations of the proposed General Plan, Phase I Zoning, CAP, and BVSP as described above and listed below, the impact of the BVSP and associated zoning regulations would be less than significant.

Proposed General Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

Land Use Element

2.13-4 Minimize light and glare from new development.

Conservation Element

5.3-6 Avoid light pollution and unnecessary glare by requiring development projects to use design features and shielding methods that cast outdoor light downward and minimize glare and to install the minimum amount of outdoor lighting necessary for safety and security.

Proposed Phase I Zoning Provisions that Would Reduce the Impact

The proposed Phase I Zoning amendments introduce a definition for “full cutoff lighting:”

Lighting, Full Cut-Off. A lighting fixture constructed in such a manner that it meets the adopted criteria of the Illuminating Society of North America and all light emitted by the fixture, either directly from the lamp or a diffusing element, or indirectly by reflection or refraction from any part of the luminaire, is projected an angle of 90 degrees, and above a vertical angle of 80 degrees, the luminous intensity cannot exceed 10 percent of the light or the lamp or lamps of the fixture. Also known as a fully shielded light fixture.

Full cut-off lighting fixtures would be required in the design standards for new zoning districts referenced under Impact 4.1-3 above.

Proposed Belmont Village Specific Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

There are no policies in the Belmont Village Specific Plan that relate to this topic. General Plan policies also apply to the BVSP Area.

Proposed Climate Action Plan Policies that Would Reduce the Impact

EM1 Replace street, signal lights, parks and parking lot lighting with efficient lighting (LEDs, induction, etc).

Mitigation Measures

None required.

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